

Memories of the buffalo shooters: Joe Cooper and the Tiwi (1895–1936)

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The Tiwi Islands, of which Melville is the largest, are located to the northwest of Darwin, Northern Territory. In the 1960s memories of the exploits of buffalo shooter Joe Cooper on Melville Island were still fresh in the minds of the Tiwi elders. These exploits made a serious impact on local society, bringing about changes that were, to some extent, to transform the future of the islanders. Cooper's presence in the islands brought about not only a level of cultural innovation but also lasting connections with a mainland tribe, who like the Tiwi, had experienced a British garrison in their tribal country in the 1820s.¹ Furthermore, for the first time the Tiwi were to suffer violence at the hands of another Indigenous group.²

In the broader public a mythology developed about Cooper.³ He was credited with fighting a fictitious duel to become 'king' of the island, and with establishing a peaceful environment in which he could travel unarmed and a mission could be established in the islands. In truth, Robert Joel (Joe) Cooper and his brother Harry had moved from their native South Australia to the Northern Territory, in about 1881, later becoming buffalo hunters on the Cobourg Peninsula and in the Alligator Rivers area. Joe then managed buffalo shooting operations on Melville Island for EO Robinson who successfully applied for two pastoral leases over Melville Island in 1892.⁴ Buffalo shooting operations there actually commenced in April 1895 when Robinson sailed for Cape Gambier on southern Melville Island with Joe Cooper and J (Barney) Flynn, together with a team of horses.⁵ Cape Gambier is located in the 'country' of the Mandiimbula, one of the Tiwi bands. A small band of Iwaidja men from the Malay Bay - Port Essington area were recruited to work with Cooper and Flynn.

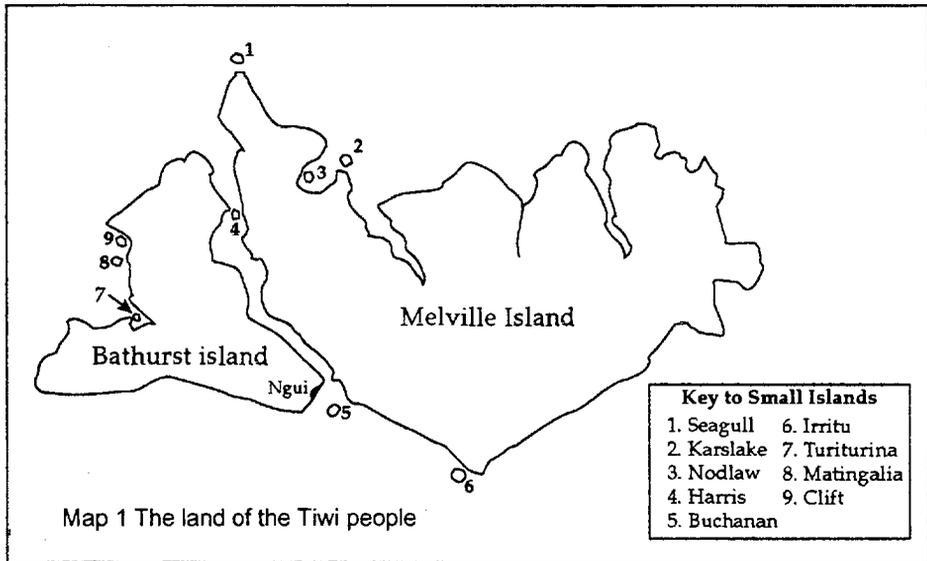
1. The British occupied Fort Dundas on Melville Island from 1824 to 1829, and Fort Wellington and the town and fort of Victoria, both in Iwaidja country, between 1826 and 1829 and 1838 and 1849 respectively.

2. Tiwi oral history tells of a raid on Melville Island by the Larrakia in the nineteenth century. Several women were stolen by the raiders but there is no oral record of any Tiwi being killed.

3. See Morris (1999) for examples of such writings.

4. *South Australian Register*, 27 May 1897: 5. The buffalo, of unknown numbers, were descended from a herd left on the island when Fort Dundas was abandoned in 1829.

5. *Northern Territory Times*, 8 Mar 1895.



Robinson apparently spent some time with his shooters before leaving Cooper and Flynn as the only two Europeans on the island.⁶ Tiwi oral history indicates that there was fear among the first Mandiimbula to observe the shooters.⁷ Cooper, said the elders, tried to catch Tiwi people to quieten them by giving them 'plenty presents'. If Islander oral history is correct, however, there was another side to the buffalo shooters' presence on Melville Island. By late 1895 or early 1896 Cooper and his team worked their way around Melville Island as far as the island's northern side.⁸ The people there greeted the Iwaidja with cries of '*Pongki! Pongki!*' (Peace! Peace!). When the Iwaidja tried to catch them the Islanders fled, some into swampland. They apparently had no understanding of the Iwaidja's intentions. Six Tiwi men and women were shot by the Iwaidja, while on the southern side of Melville Island another man was wounded.

Rightly or wrongly the elders blamed Flynn for the shootings, one elder commenting that 'Barney Flynn bin kill lotta people. (Flynn) go along bush, (people) run away.' Later, on the mainland a 'blackfella' sang poison into Flynn.⁹ In fact, Flynn died from a snake bite in his buffalo-shooting camp in the Alligator Rivers area.¹⁰ It is impossible to establish whether Flynn was involved in deliberate shootings of Tiwi people. An inquiry in 1915 concluded that the Iwaidja carried out the shootings of their own volition.

By early June 1895, according to Robinson, trouble with the Tiwi had been minimal. Flynn had a narrow escape when a spear grazed his shoulder. Despite 'the animosity of the savages' the Tiwi had apparently retreated 'to quieter parts of the country'

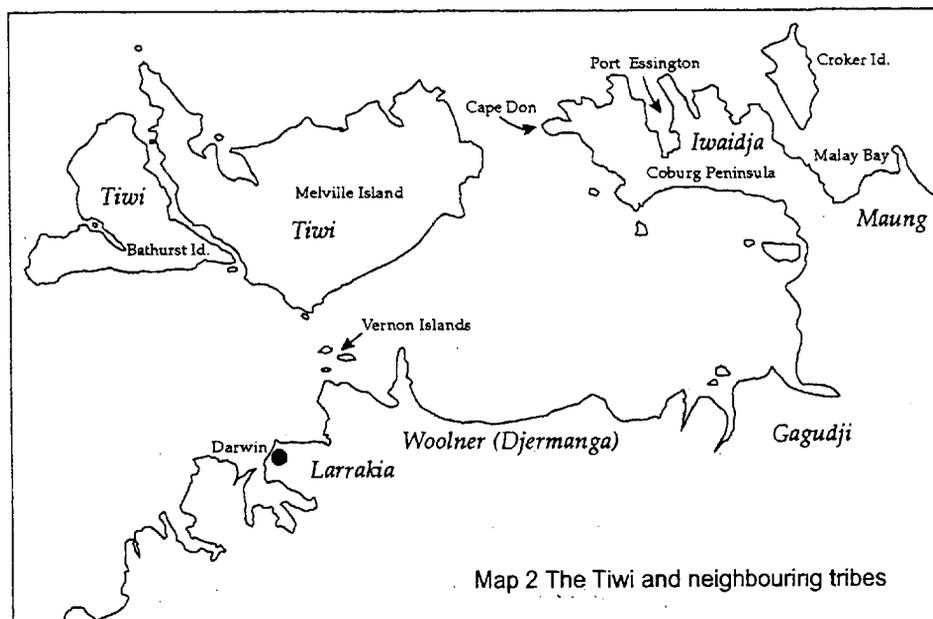
6. *South Australian Register* 27 May 1897: 5.

7. See Morris (1999) for details of interviews with the Tiwi and Iwaidja elders whose memories of Cooper and his times form the basis of this article.

8. These dates are approximations based on the time taken by buffalo-shooting teams to work across the 5697 square kilometres of the island. The *Northern Territory Times* 7 Jun 1895 and the *South Australian Register* 27 May 1897 p 6 indicate the localities in which the shooters operated.

9. Interview with Paddy Porkilari, 16 Feb 1965.

10. Searcy 1909: 235.



and the shooters' horses were able to graze safely.¹¹ On 26 June, 1895, however, the *South Australian Register* proclaimed 'OUTRAGE BY NATIVES. A BUFFALO-HUNTER SPEARED'. The *Northern Territory Times*, which was not a daily publication, reported two days later the 'Spearing of J. Cooper on Melville Island'. Like other incidents in his life, the circumstances surrounding the wounding of Cooper have become the subject of some error or have been magnified to a large extent. Even the *Northern Territory Times* published two versions, one given by either Cooper or another party, possibly Captain James of the lugger *Beatrice*, and the other a report handed to the police in Darwin. Cooper stated that he rode out of his Cape Gambier camp early in the morning of 24 June 1895 ahead of some Iwaidja employees who were on foot. Flynn went in another direction with other Aboriginal workers. Cooper claimed that he was speared in the left shoulder by a Tiwi Islander. Dismounting, he fired a shot at a group of Tiwi who were about a hundred yards from him and who fled. Breaking off the spear he walked back to the camp.

Ngaringari, an Iwaidja hunter, who was present at the incident, stated that Cooper saw a Mandiimbula man named Porkilari while riding through the bush. Wishing to make peace with him Cooper rode after Porkilari who leapt behind a tree. As Cooper grabbed his wrist Porkilari lunged a spear at him from the other side of the tree, spearing him through the shoulder.¹² Tiwi elders confirmed Ngaringari's version. When Cooper was speared the Iwaidja with him were said to have run away.¹³

11. *Northern Territory Times*, 7 Jun 1895.

12. Interviews with John Ngaringari, 22 Jun 1964, and Jerry Kerinaiaua, 17 Aug 1964.

13. Interview with Jerry Kerinaiaua, 1 Jun 1965.

Alfred Searcy, a customs officer, arrived at Cape Gambier on the morning of the attack and witnessed Cooper's evacuation to Darwin on the lugger *Beatrice*. While at the camp Searcy 'went inland for a few miles, but never a sign of a nigger did we see'.¹⁴ The Iwaidja, said Searcy, 'were in mortal dread of the island blacks'.¹⁵ Soon after the spearing of Cooper one of them was wounded in an attack upon the mainlanders. He later died in Darwin Hospital. As for Cooper, the *South Australian Register* of 25 June, 1897, reported that he had been able to return to Melville Island within three weeks of being injured, although he carried a large scar for the rest of his life.

Horses used by the hunters were also attacked. A small number of Tiwi were gradually attracted to Cooper's camp, but others remained opposed to the buffalo-shooters. Although Robinson had stated early in June 1895 that the horses could graze freely, he later stated that 'we found the natives very hostile and daring there, and lost one horse, which they speared. They speared two other horses, but not fatally'.¹⁶ Again, on 19 June 1896, *The Northern Territory Times* commented that the 'Melville Islanders have been showing their teeth again ... one of J. Flynn's horses (being) speared by the unfriendly savages' a few days previously.

Additional men having joined Cooper's team late in 1895, hunting operations continued well into 1896.¹⁷ During those two years the island's buffalo population had been depleted by about 7000 beasts.¹⁸ Wishing to build up the herds again, Robinson withdrew Cooper and the other hunters at the end of 1896.¹⁹ Standing out graphically in Tiwi memory is the departure, on Cooper's lugger, of a group of about twelve Tiwi women and babies and two Island men, sailing for the Cobourg Peninsula. The removal of the Tiwi is noted in an official report into later activities on the island.²⁰ It is not clear why the Tiwi choose to go with Cooper, although at least one woman was a consort to an Iwaidja man.

Robinson sold his leases over Melville Island in the next few years, repurchasing them in 1902.²¹ He did not, however, recommence shooting activities on Melville Island until the end of June 1905. Cooper was again in charge of operations, this time with a larger team which included his brother Harry.²² Tiwi oral history recalls that Robinson came to Cape Gambier in the lugger *Essington*, along with Samuel Ingeruintamirri, one of the Mandiimbula who had been on the mainland.

Samuel, not Cooper, was the key to the peaceful return of the buffalo-shooters. He walked up the beach, calling out towards the bush to identify himself, hoping that some of the Mandiimbula were camped above Cape Gambier. Hearing him, the people who were there came to meet him on the beach, hitting themselves in Tiwi fashion as a sign

14. Searcy 1909: 234-7.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Searcy 1909: 237; *South Australian Register*, 27/5/1897: 6.

17. *Northern Territory Times*, 22 Nov 1895.

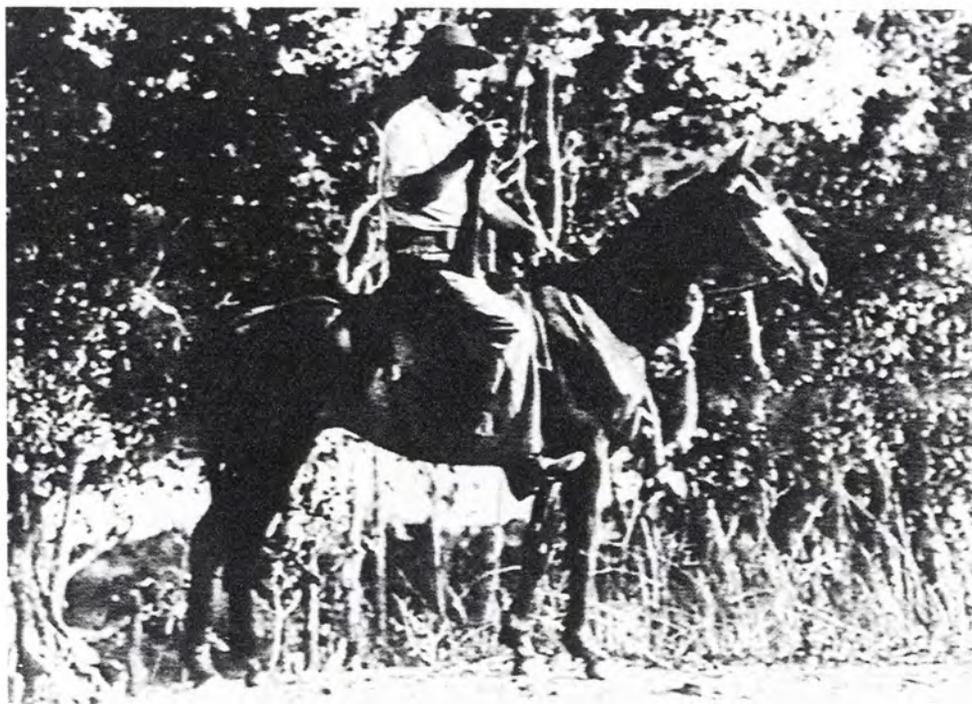
18. *Northern Territory Times*, 13 Nov 1896 and 30 Jun 1905.

19. *Ibid.*

20. National Archives of Australia (NAA) Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - 15/3320, WG Stretton, 'Melville Island Inquiry', 28 May 1915, attachment.

21. South Australian State Records (SASR), GRS1/300/1897 and GRS10/16901/1907; *Northern Territory Times*, 13 Apr 1900.

22. *Northern Territory Times*, 30 Jun 1905.



Joe Cooper on Melville Island (Courtesy of Northern Territory State Library)

of past grief for they had thought that he, and the others who had left the island with him, had been lost forever. Samuel handed out what must have appeared to be a wealth of trade goods. Robinson then came up, also handing out presents. Samuel told his fellow Islanders that Joe Cooper was returning to their land. When the shooters and their horses, and later Cooper, arrived from the mainland the Tiwi offered no violence. There were, however, bands other than the Mandiimbula who were not peaceful or who had reason not to be peaceful. Despite the popular picture of Cooper establishing peace on the island he was actually on his guard during the years he was to spend there.

In the final days of June 1905 the steamer *Wai Hoi* made two trips from Darwin to Yulupoo on Cape Gambier, transporting 20 horses bred by the Cooper brothers.²³ Harry Cooper and Samuel Ingeruintamirri escorted the horses which the Mandiimbula happily helped to unload. Several Darwin residents who travelled on each of the *Wai Hoi*'s trips to Melville Island were impressed by the friendliness and the physical appearance of the Tiwi they saw on the beach. Unlike Aborigines around Darwin, the Tiwi were not suffering from the effects of alcohol and opium.²⁴

On its second trip the *Wai Hoi* brought back to Melville Island all except one of those Tiwi who had departed in 1896. The remaining man had died at Oenpelli. The returning people belonged to the Mandiimbula and Yeimpi bands, five of the women in this group having taken Iwaidja or Gagudju (Kakadu) husbands. This no doubt assisted the devel-

^{23.} *Ibid.*

^{24.} *Ibid.*

opment of enduring relationships between the Aboriginal buffalo shooters and these bands. Understanding of the mainlanders was also assisted by the insight the Tiwi had gained into aspects of their culture during their stay in Western Arnhem Land.

Joe Cooper, says Tiwi oral history, returned to Melville Island in a cutter some time after the *Wai Hoi's* trips on or about 27 and 28 June 1905. Upon his arrival two of the Tiwi women who had been on the mainland with him called to their fellow Islanders who were at Panarli, 'Pongki! Pongki! (Peace! Peace!) This man quiet!'²⁵

Three frightened Mandiimbula men walking along the beach were given damper and buffalo meat, which surprisingly they had not eaten before, being seen as suitable only for dogs. Suspicious, they buried the food. They were also frightened of matches.

There is some confusion as to how many Iwaidja were in Cooper's team and whether there were any mainland women with this team. The *Northern Territory Times* of 30 June 1905 states that '30 or thereabouts Aborigines' were travelling to Melville Island on the *Wai Hoi*, including 'two or three' Tiwi who had been brought to the mainland in 1896. Cooper gave evidence in 1915 that he had brought 18 mainland Aborigines, including two women, to the islands in 1905.²⁶

Whatever the number of Iwaidja on Melville Island, during the next eleven years they became, to varying degrees, agents of cultural and social change in the Tiwi Islands. They introduced the didjeridu (didgeridoo) to the islands but it was rejected by the Tiwi. Whether the Islanders adopted the message stick from the Iwaidja or not is the subject of debate among the Tiwi. If it was introduced by the buffalo hunters it was quickly absorbed into local use. Although Iwaidja ritual was witnessed by the Tiwi, local ceremonies prevailed. To a limited extent Iwaidja culture was diffused into the islands through the accommodation of a small number of words into the local language, wholly or in a Tiwi version of some words. Possibly the biggest effect of the Iwaidja presence was the wider employment of dugout canoes. On an epistemological level, with arrival of the mainlanders the Tiwi became acquainted with, and absorbed into their own culture, the concepts of magic and death by poisoning. While these beliefs became an important function in Islander convictions and law, the details of their actual application were and are beyond Tiwi comprehension.

On the whole, Tiwi customs and traditions were not greatly affected by this prolonged episode of inter-cultural contact. As will be seen, however, for the first time this contact resulted in a strong physical relationship between the Tiwi and another Indigenous group through marriage and descent. Moreover, the mainlanders became instruments of aggression in Tiwi society.

The spread of the buffalo-shooting teams across Melville Island resulted in the attraction of a number of Tiwi to employment with Cooper in exchange for food and other desired items. Many Tiwi remained suspicious of, and even antagonistic towards the outsiders. Gradually the shooters made inroads into the 'country' of bands other than the Mandiimbula. More Tiwi came into frequent contact with the foreigners. By late 1906 a large number of Tiwi had established themselves in a shooters' camp near

²⁵ Interview with Cardo (Kartu) Kerinaia and Albert Kulappaku Croker, 26 Mar 1964.

²⁶ NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - 15/3220, WG Stretton, 'Melville Island Inquiry', 28 May 1915: evidence by RJ Cooper.

the Jessie River in northeastern Melville Island. Nevertheless, several horses were killed or injured by suspicious Tiwi. There was, however, a greater cause for Tiwi discontent. This resulted from a lack or virtual lack of mainland women in the Iwaidja ranks on Melville Island. The Iwaidja therefore sought Tiwi women. Academic and popular writings about Cooper's time in the islands usually fail to mention the aggression caused by the mainlanders' demand for women.

As long as they were armed with rifles the Iwaidja apparently displayed no dread of the Tiwi. In the mid-1890s the Tiwi had experienced terror and the kidnapping of several females at the hands of the Iwaidja on the north coast of the island. Now, for the first time they were fired upon in the interior of both Melville Island and the neighbouring Bathurst Island. Allegations about Cooper's involvement in the shootings cannot be substantiated. In a subsequent enquiry in 1915, no suggestion was made of charges being laid against Cooper. Nevertheless, a feeling still existed among many Tiwi elders in the 1960s that Cooper, being in charge of the buffalo-shooting enterprise, must have been responsible for the actions of the Iwaidja.

What is clear is that the Tiwi were witnessing a change in their history, an alliance between some Islanders and an outside force. However, care is needed in making any statement as to how far this alliance went. Survivors of the Cooper era insist that no alliance existed between the mainlanders and the larger part of any Tiwi band. This contrasts with statements by writers who see a strong relationship between the Iwaidja and the Mandiimbula and Yeimpi bands in particular.²⁷ Proposals for the theft of Tiwi women by the Iwaidja are even attributed to some Islanders.²⁸ The only Tiwi oral history to support this suggestion concerns an incident in which two Mandiimbula men accompanied several Iwaidja men to kidnap a woman on Bathurst Island in 1911. The Iwaidja were beaten by local Tiwi men and their rifles seized and returned to Cooper's camp.²⁹ This event occurred while Cooper was on holidays in southern Australia. In other incidents two old women and a man were shot on Bathurst Island and four Tiwi women seized by the Iwaidja. The names of about 24 Islander women who were taken by the Iwaidja in or after 1910 were still etched in the minds of the elders in the 1960s. One of the women, then a girl, escaped from an Iwaidja camp, despite being fired at.

The death of Harry Cooper at Cape Gambier in 1907 added to the Cooper legend. For some reason the belief arose that Harry was speared by the Tiwi.³⁰ In fact, Harry died of disease in his bed on 10 April 1907, and Joe took the body to Darwin.³¹ Tiwi oral history, with its emphatic statement that Harry had died of natural causes, not from a spear wound, was closer to the truth than the public legend.

Within a short time of his brother's death, the decline in the number of buffalo forced Joe Cooper to turn to the cutting and milling of cypress pine. The Tiwi were thus

27. Poignant 1996: 40, note 16; Pilling 1957: 192.

28. Hart, Pilling and Goodale 1988: 109.

29. *Northern Territory Times*, 21 Apr 1911 and 19 May 1911.

30. See, for instance, Reid 1990: 98; Powell 1988: 104; Goodale 1974: 10; Spencer 1928: 657.

31. *Northern Territory Times*, 16 Apr 1907 and 26 Apr 1907. While this newspaper, 16 Apr 1907, reported that the examining doctor certified the cause of death as heart failure, the Archives of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, Northern Territory, Entry 132, lists the cause of death as syphilis.

introduced to new machinery and equipment from at least 1908.³² Gradually a number of other timber-getters moved into Melville Island, leading to employment for a few Tiwi and some conflict between the Europeans there.

By 1911 several events occurred which would have a large bearing on the Tiwi. In June a Catholic mission station was established at Nguuiu on Bathurst Island. With the transfer of the Northern Territory from South Australian to Commonwealth administration in 1911, Federal authorities took more interest in the circumstances of the Territory's Aboriginal population than South Australia had. The Aboriginal Department was rejuvenated. Baldwin Spencer was appointed Special Commissioner on Aboriginal matters in 1911, becoming Chief Protector of Aborigines in the following year. Along with John Gilruth, later Administrator of the Northern Territory, Spencer spent time with Cooper and, to a lesser extent, with Father F.X. Gsell at Nguuiu. He gathered a copious amount of ethnographical material on both the Tiwi and the Iwaidja in 1911 and 1912.³³

Spencer's writings about his visits to the islands raise doubts about claims that Cooper pacified the Tiwi, making the islands safe for Caucasian visitors and allowing Gsell to peacefully settle at Nguuiu. Spencer followed Cooper's practice of never leaving the camp unarmed.³⁴ Spencer noted that Cooper 'takes good care to have his body-guard of Port Essington (Iwaidja) boys with him when he hunts.'³⁵ Iwaidja elder John Ngarinngari verified these comments with his memory of Cooper always being armed with one or two revolvers and a shotgun or rifle.³⁶ The evidence of Cooper being on his guard against a possible attack by the Tiwi is in contrast to the widely publicised picture of him pursuing Islander law breakers while clad only in a loin cloth and armed with a spear, something which the Tiwi deny ever occurred.³⁷ On the other hand, he did take part in Indigenous ceremonies both at Malay Bay and on Melville Island.

The issuing of timber-getting licences in the Territory led to a small increase in the number of Caucasians on Melville Island as further sawmills were established. Cooper was therefore appointed Honorary Sub-Protector of Aborigines for the Tiwi Islands by Spencer.³⁸ Elderly and infirm Tiwi who visited Paru could obtain government rations. Cooper was also responsible for the supervision of 'incorrigible' Aborigines sent to Paru from Darwin. A few were also sent to Nguuiu mission. For the first time, the Tiwi, apart from those relative few who had travelled to Darwin with Cooper, encountered Aborigines with serious social problems arising from consumption of alcohol and opium.

The Administrator of the Northern Territory reported in 1913 that in contrast to most Indigenous groups on the Territory mainland, the population of the Tiwi Islands

32. SASR GRS10/17465/1907, July 1908.

33. Spencer 1928: 641-713, 910-14; Spencer 1912a: 36; Spencer 1912b: 5, 13-18, 29-31, 34-5, 47-50, 55-56, 58.

34. Spencer 1928: 643; NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT007080/1914, Spencer to Hunt, 19 Nov.

35. Spencer 1928: 658.

36. Interview with John Ngarinngari, Paru, 22 Jun 1964.

37. For example Beatty 1965: 30; Sunter 1937: 134-5.

38. Spencer 1928: 720; NAA Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245 - NT 007080/1914, Spencer to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 19 Nov 1914, attachment p 1. The date of appointment is not given.

included numerous children.³⁹ However, the Islanders were now exposed to alcohol and disease. Since 1905 a small number of Tiwi men had either worked on Cooper's luggers or had gradually gained employment in Darwin. They were in demand as workers on the mainland. For some, the introduction to alcohol led to social problems, but it is not known whether any were imprisoned in those early years.⁴⁰

Contact with Europeans and mainland Aborigines exposed the Islanders to several forms of disease from as early as 1911. Cooper's attitude to his honorary responsibilities led to official praise, his attention to the sick and diseased in the islands was noted and Spencer acknowledged his kindness to, and his interest in, the Aborigines residing in the islands.⁴¹ Tiwi elders recalled his organising a Tiwi mortuary ritual when Josephine, a daughter of Cooper and his Iwaidja consort, Alice Rose Mara-oldain, died in 1914.

For Cooper, his life on Melville Island slowly fractured. The Iwaidja and Tiwi would work only for Cooper, as would other mainland Aborigines who occasionally sought work with Cooper in his timber-cutting and milling operations. The other timber-getters on the island were therefore forced to request Indigenous labour from Cooper. In 1914 timber-getters Sam Green and R. Webb laid a complaint to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, H.E. Carey, alleging mistreatment of several of the 'incorrigibles' by Cooper, shootings by the Iwaidja and the contracting of sexual disease by some Tiwi, allegedly from the mainlanders.⁴² Green, in particular, was unhappy about Cooper's management of the 'prisoners', as he called the 'incorrigibles, and of the lawlessness of the Iwaidja. Both Gilruth and Spencer gave support to Cooper.⁴³ Nevertheless, Cooper was faced with the possibility of official action and the fact that Robinson had sold the Melville Island leases to Melville Island Limited. He therefore resigned his Honorary Sub-Protectorship.⁴⁴ He also took action to ensure that firearms used by the Iwaidja were secured when not being legitimately used.

An investigation into Green's allegations and health conditions on the island was held in mid-1915. This was undertaken by WG Stretton, SM, Dr MJ Holmes and Chief Inspector JT Beckett. Stretton concluded that shootings and conflict had take place, but that such 'lawlessness' was, in the main, of the Iwaidjas' doing, and had occurred in Cooper's absence. Cooper's stepson, Ted, was considered to have shot several people. The 'incorrigibles', Stretton found, were properly fed by Cooper. He considered that a large portion of the evidence put to him would not be admitted in a court of law.⁴⁵ Only 20 unidentified Aborigines were found to be suffering from sexual and other diseases.

³⁹. *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p 49.

⁴⁰. *Ibid*, p 36.

⁴¹. NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/15, Holmes to Administrator, 27 May 1915, pp 3-4; NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT007080, Spencer to Hunt (Secretary, Department of External Affairs), 19 Nov 1914, attachment p 1.

⁴². NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT006824/1914, Green to Minister for External Affairs, 6 Nov 1914.

⁴³. NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT007080/1914, Spencer to Hunt, 19 Nov 1914; NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Gilruth to Minister for External Affairs, 4/6/1915.

⁴⁴. NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Gilruth to Minister for External Affairs, 4 Jun 1915, pp 2-3; *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1914-15*, p 24.

A decision was taken to deport all mainland Aborigines employed by Cooper and other Europeans on Melville Island. Before this was accomplished Cooper narrowly missed being tomahawked by a Tiwi man over the stealing of the women by the Iwaidja.⁴⁶ In another incident a Tiwi man was accidentally shot by an Iwaidja.⁴⁷ Worse was to come for Cooper. Late in 1915, at the beginning of the Wet Season, Cooper lost a lugger, the second to sink with its cargo in the islands. By 21 December 1915, all of the Iwaidja, together with some of the Tiwi women and their children, had left the islands.⁴⁸ Cooper and his family departed early in 1916. The association between Cooper, the Iwaidja and the Tiwi, particularly the Mandiimbula and Yeimpi bands, did not end with this departure. A number joined Cooper in trepanning off eastern Melville Island or in milling or buffalo shooting operations on the Cobourg Peninsula. Tiwi oral history tells of the relationship which continued with the Iwaidja, including those who were related to them.⁴⁹ When Alice Rose passed away in Darwin on 27 August 1929, some Tiwi participated in a mourning ritual for her, as they did for Joe Cooper when he died in Darwin hospital on 7 August 1936, aged 76 years.

Cooper is seen in two lights by the elders who witnessed so much of the drama which formed the bases for the varying versions of reality. In the first he is seen as a man who established a source of employment which enabled some Tiwi to gain the goods they desired. For those who worked for him on the mainland there was the occasional opportunity to use firearms and horses. On Melville Island, on the other hand, their only employment was to help in skinning the fallen beasts and carrying the hides. In the other light Cooper is held to be a decent man but one whose good character was destroyed by perceived responsibility for the shootings by the Iwaidja and for Iwaidja misuse of Tiwi women.

Socially, politically and culturally the world of the Tiwi was widened by contact with outside peoples and by their exposure to the outside, European controlled world. A low level of technical and epistemological change occurred. On a disturbing note, new diseases and social problems were introduced, along with the knowledge of other Indigenous people whose traditional lifestyle, health and social wellbeing had suffered the effects of European movement into their lands. Moreover, they learnt that other Aborigines equipped with firearms could wreak a certain level of violence and havoc among them.

There is no doubt that Cooper had a social and economic impact on the Tiwi. As for the Iwaidja, their impact on islands' linguistic and material culture is evident but not of any great magnitude. Rather, their impression on the Tiwi was more of a cultural-political one, intruding into an established marriage arrangement system, resulting in an inter-tribal kinship movement that is recognised to this day.

45. NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - 15/3220, WG Stretton, 'Melville Island Inquiry', 28 Jun 1915, pp 1-7 and Evidence of Witnesses.

46. Interview with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 29 Oct 1964.

47. NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT004762, telegram, Green to Minister for External Affairs, 29 Aug 1915.

48. NAA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT005954/1916, Gilruth to Secretary, External Affairs, 21 Dec 1915.

49. Poignant 1996: 24-41.

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